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Ousted by Oedipus

ABSTRACT This story migrates through the cracks of enclosures that are built in reactive resistance to the movement of what is always already there. Turbulence drops the author in divergent times and spaces as she seeks to find ways of being with others, forming emergent collectivities in the wild, after having been ousted by Oedipus. But as the author tries in vain to enclose meaning in the movement, she learns there is value in dispossession. **KEYWORDS** Race; Feminism; Migration; Movement; Belonging

This broken story begins with turbulent flows as it migrates from Philadelphia to Edinburgh through a storm.¹ “As you can tell, it’s real messy up here,” the pilot declares as plastic cups take flights of their own that have very different trajectories from the one I am on to Edinburgh. Our eyes meet, mine and the passenger beside me, and a smile twitches between us; and momentarily we are two feral animals, hares I think, who don’t know each other but together in homelessness take a transient interest.² If I could shift enough with this seatbelt strapped around me to be able to transmigrate to a position where I could get all meta about this situation, then I would be imagining whether the hare-strangers sense they may share the intimacy of their death and therefore should make some kind of connection beforehand so that somehow it can be more meaningful. I lean my head against the window and try to restrain my quick breathing as turbulence urges me to “consider the space between life and the inevitability of death and how we might live (more) consciously in between.”³ The sky looks vast and wild. I wish I am home.

This turbulent story now migrates in the form of a seemingly random drop to when I am four years old and am taken horse riding for the first time. Probably the pony is little, and I am not far off the ground, but when the pony moves, I cry. The teenage instructor says, perhaps too sarcastically for a four-year-old, that horses do actually move. She rolls her eyes and says, “That is what they do.” But I am already shaken by the displacement and

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want down. I don't want the pony to move or at least I don't want it to move me.

Turbulence lifts me off the horse and plummets me into Spanish class and to when I am fourteen years old. But I don't remember much Spanish at all now, probably because I sit next to Lachie, with whom I am in passionate and unrequited love. He is concentrating more than I am and is no doubt presently fluent in Spanish, whereas I am left with just two single sentences. So, when I first read Erin Manning's chapter in *Socially Just Pedagogies*, I don't know that *Me lo dijo un pajarito* means "a bird told me."⁴ One of the two sentences I can remember in Spanish is *In mi tiempo libre, me gusta montar a caballo*, meaning that in my free time I like to go horse riding.

I recall this sentence easily because I have said it regularly. After an atrocious start, horse riding becomes my first love, one that is even more profound than the love I felt for Lachie, although that was pretty deep. As it turned out, the sarcastic teenage instructor had been a talented teacher, and somewhere along the treks, my fear of the horses' movement subsided. I became a speed junkie, the faster and wilder the better. I worked at the stables in the evening to pay for my riding with Santos, a runaway and rescued Palomino. I spent weekends teaching children how to ride, and every time a child got on a pony for the very first time, I would tell them a secret. *Me lo dijo pajarito*. I would whisper, "A little bird tells me that these things move."

My seatbelt on the airplane contracts as I am thrown forward to when I am 24 years old, and I rediscover that I am still not always okay with movement. I give birth to my eldest child who now, even at nearly sixteen years old, cannot sit still. Something always has to vibrate; a foot, a finger, a leg. It isn't his fault; his movements are non-voluntary. I don't tell him off, but instead, I often take my hand, place it on his leg and gently yet firmly press down, earthing him, grounding him. Making. Him. Still. Until I read Manning's beautiful analogy about stimming⁵ and I began to listen instead to these oscillations as the echolalia of the vast and wild sky, the dance of migration into what lies on the other side of pragmatism, performing the as yet unstilled in the stilling. My boy, who I thought of as physically awkward, who I had to entrain to be in time with the rhythm of the rest of the world, was actually the one who was attuning to and connecting to the world's rhythms, and to the beats that resisted enclosure.

Looking out of the airplane window to the tempestuous sky I wonder, what if this wild, vast outside is not outside of the airplane at all but instead is, as Jack Halberstam writes, "space and time which is always here."⁶ What if our enclosures—airplanes and homes and churches and universities—are

reactive responses to this intensive space, often set up in its resistance?⁷ Yet, as you close your curtains against the dark night, a foot stims in its name. The choir sings in the church, but the mellow song-story of the busker migrates through the stained-glass sound barrier as the falsetto shatters. The mosquito flies silently through the cracks, the butterfly lands softly on the pillow, and the “aesthetic sociality of blackness as an improvised political assemblage that resides in the heart of the polity but operates under its ground and on its edge” sweeps across the surface where its unrest is felt.⁸

This migrating story continues its turbulent flight to Edinburgh. The hare beside her has managed to fall asleep, but she is too vigilant for dreaming. She tells herself, “Planes move. That is what they do.” She needs a distraction and begins to read. The words fall into her eyes.

Of course, smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us.⁹

She looks out the window once again and thinks, “There is no salvation out there, there is no church in the wild.”¹⁰ A smile spontaneously migrates over her face.¹¹ Why is she looking for a church anyway? She lets more words fall: “I have greedily taken concepts I could use from Deleuze and traced lines of flight, not away from, but into the turbulence of this life. . . searching for smooth spaces in which something different might happen.”¹² The words immobilize her fear, and instead, she feels the courage to refuse the church even if there was one, and with the letting go of the church, she no longer feels such a desire for home.¹³

Another turbulent jolt catapults her to the launch of the Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry, based at the University of Edinburgh. The question posed to her, and others who are interested in the new Centre is, “What would you like this Centre to be? How would you see your relationship to it?” Many members of the group talk about home and belonging.

“A home.”

“A home for me and my work.”

“Somewhere I can belong.”

A home. The word jarred.

Home? She tried to make it comfortable in her mouth.

She crosses her leg.

Her foot stims.

A glass of water trembles.

Slight turbulence momentarily jolts her from the launch of the Centre to the home where she is twelve years old. She is scared to reach out to still the water that trembles as the table works hard to repel the weight of his landing fist.

Jolt

The Centre.

“Yes, me too,” another says “I want it to be a home.”

She takes her hand and stills the trembling glass and grounds her stinging foot.

She doesn’t want the Centre to be a home for her work, at least not a physical one with windows and curtains, built to resist the wilderness and the wildbeasts, creating its outside(rs). Instead, she hopes it will remain an intensive space that resists the enclosures themselves, without becoming one, working only in the end to narrow the thresholds that lie between.

She shares the group’s desire to belong but is not sure how “belonging” works in the wild. Looking around the room she can crudely say that it looks like some of the present bodies, some of the very ones who want the Centre to be a “home,” are bodies that don’t seem particularly untypical or as though they wouldn’t already belong in the university. Their difference is not clearly marked. Some bodies are even male and white and look in this instance like the exact bodyings that the university promotes.¹⁴ Why do they not already feel like they belong? She leaves the answer on the other side of the question.

She looks at the becoming familiar faces of the passengers on the airplane, the ones who are thrown by the same turbulence and also can find no church

in the wild sharing a place from which emerges neither self-consciousness nor knowledge of the other but an improvisation that proceeds from somewhere on the other side of an unasked question? Not simply to be among his own; but to be among his own in dispossession, to be among the ones who cannot own, the ones who have nothing and who, in having nothing, have everything.¹⁵

Dispossession is the undercommons’ mode of belonging.

An unexpected drop. Could the Centre even be thought of as a gender, rather than a home? Gender not as in biopolitical gender but gender as an affective assemblage, a site of political resistance?¹⁶ Is this too far-flung? Turbulence thinks so and takes her back to the time when she begins to grow into herself. People stopped saying she was her father’s spitting image and instead she wiped his spit from her cheek as he put his face so close to hers that she could

see that even the fine fair hairs on his nose were pointing at her. “Why do you always have to be contrary? You forever have to be the black sheep.” And with that forever, her identity was captured as one that cannot be easily incorporated into the family structure, or indeed into the “home.”

Do black sheep migrate? The role of the scapegoat, biblically speaking is to migrate into the unforgiving wilderness, a real wildebeest, and take the group’s sins with them. They are often thought of as strong, willful subjects.¹⁷ Sometimes they are taught to be strong by the same people who oust them as robustness is a required attribute; although they must disappear, they are not supposed to die or be annihilated as this would create guilt, redistributing the sins they were meant to take away. Instead, their job is to have diminished integrity, to uphold typicality. They are not supposed to form collective intelligencies for precisely the reason that the typical already feels threatened. These disparate and harmful intimacies exist in the home and can be felt behind the word “precarity” at work. We prefer to use the word precarious as it feels more distancing and impersonal but ultimately is one and the same thing.¹⁸ She looks around at the people at the launch, a room full of not just black sheep but wild horses and wolves and coyotes, and maybe even some rats, alongside eagles. Can you hear them? *Me lo dijo un pajarito*, the sound of “emergent socialities”¹⁹ of the dispossessed who have come together in homelessness, who have come to find futurities where “the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.”²⁰

The turbulent story nears its end with the successful grounding of the plane in Edinburgh. “Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached.”²¹ Being grounded was the worst punishment he could impose. It meant no horse riding and no me and Santos—stowing away into alternative open lands, lands far away from Oedipus. All we had to rely on was our collective intuition and attunement to the earth around us. What was valued was the risk, the freedom, the joy, the exploration, the speed, and the slower moments when we stopped for a while; me skimming stones in the river while Santos attempted to stamp on the flies that had made their home in his tail. We were fugitives, together in homelessness.²²

I walk down the steps from the plane to the ground. To become ungrounded, I had to explain myself and my behavior. The truth was not relevant. For others, truth results in the changing of the benchmarks and the rephrasing of the questions. What insulation subjects have at their disposal could be a

measure of their privilege.²³ The truth for me, I learn, is the answer that supports his hypothesis. The cost of not doing so, of not adventuring with Santos, is too high. I opt to sell my soul and give the correct answer and my foot stims with the answer's remainder.

That night, I dream that the university turns up for therapy as my new client. Manning wrote the referral: "Most days I am not at all certain that [the university] is actually capable of the kind of complex work necessary for the decolonisation of knowledge."²⁴ It is a long-held belief in the counseling field that someone with deep narcissistic wounding is not at all suitable for the complex work necessary for change to happen in the counseling room. This client tends to be a long-term client as movement and change can be slow. Feedback must be given tentatively as it hurts the open wound. The structure must self-protect to survive. Halberstam suggests that we must tear the fabric down, to build anew, to increase our ability to find each other,²⁵ but this must be one of the most painful therapeutic processes.

It is late when I get back to the house. As I go to close the curtains, I pause. I have remembered the second sentence in Spanish: *El avión está listo para partir* (the plane is ready for departure). I leave the window open. ■

FIONA ALANA MURRAY is Lecturer in the School of Health in Social Science at the University of Edinburgh. This essay, in its original form, was presented at the Capacious Affect Inquiry/Making Space Conference at Millersville University in Lancaster, PA, in August 2018. Correspondence to: Fiona Alana Murray, School of Health in Social Science, University of Edinburgh, Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG, UK. Email: fiona.a.murray@ed.ac.uk.

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